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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000690

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [TU](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: PRESS AND OFFICIAL REACTION TO  
TURKEY-ARMENIA ANNOUNCEMENT

REF: BAKU 648 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Donald Lu, Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)  
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11. (C) Summary: Baku's official reaction to the announcement of Turkey and Armenia's intention to complete the protocols leading to their normalization of relations has thus far been surprisingly restrained. Charge spoke with the Foreign Minister and the President's foreign policy advisor to encourage moderation in Baku's response. Both said that they would maintain a moderate tone. The Foreign Ministry declared that "(t)he Foreign Ministry...states that determining relations with other states is the right of every sovereign state," but added "...given that this issue directly affects Azerbaijan's national interests, the opening of the Turkey-Armenia border without resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would contradict the national interests of Azerbaijan." Media reports have been typically slow in coming, with most media reporting the statement without much comment. Other stories have slanted coverage of Turkish FM Davutoglu's comments to emphasize that the border opening is not yet on the table. While the GOAJ may be able to contain itself publicly, we have little doubt that it regards the latest announcement as yet another betrayal by Turkey (and the United States). End Summary.

#### Foreign Minister Pledges Moderation

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12. (C) On September 1, the Charge relayed the request from Washington to Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Novruz Mammadov that Azerbaijan refrain from making public comment that seeks to undermine the Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process. The Charge explained that the statement merely recognizes that political consultations have begun on two protocols, vice some newspaper headlines proclaiming an imminent border opening. He added that both Washington and Yerevan recognize that progress on Nagorno-Karabakh will be necessary in order for these protocols to be passed by the Turkish Parliament. The Charge further expressed the belief that, if well managed, this process could reinforce steps to achieve a breakthrough on Nagorno-Karabakh.

13. (C) The Foreign Minister said that he appreciated the information from Washington and that the Foreign Ministry would maintain a moderate tone in reaction to the joint statement. He said that the MFA spokesman had already made a

brief, moderate comment (see Summary) and no other statement was planned. He remarked that the explanatory statement by Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu was particularly helpful. He concluded by welcoming this idea that Washington understands that the Turkish Parliament will need to see progress on Nagorno-Karabakh before approving the Turkey-Armenia protocols.

#### Presidential Advisor Says No Provocative Statements

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¶4. (C) Presidential Advisor Mammadov said that he understood well the American position as well as the political framework under which these steps were being taken on Turkey-Armenia reconciliation. He said that he would both inform the President, but also undertake that the Azerbaijani Government will refrain from provocative statements in reaction to the joint statement. The Charge noted that the MFA spokesman had already made a brief statement reiterating the government's position that a border opening without a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute would be against Azerbaijan's national interests. The Charge emphasized that the current joint statement was not explicitly about an imminent border opening, but merely a consultative process leading to submission of the protocols to the two parliaments.

#### Public Reaction

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¶5. (C) The Turkish DCM told the Charge that he had expected a much sharper response to the statement, but so far, the reaction they have heard has been muted and certainly much better than the reaction to the original announcement of the roadmap. He pointed to the Turkish Foreign Minister's statement yesterday as perhaps helping to defuse criticism from Baku.

¶6. (C) Thus far only online media and a handful of newspapers, which have limited reach in Azerbaijan, have publicized the story. Generally, they have reported the joint statement factually, also quoting the Azerbaijani MFA's statement. Trend News, a mainstream news agency, reported a story with a headline that certain deputies of the Azerbaijani parliament believed the process could benefit the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. The piece quoted one semi-independent legislator and the deputy chairman of the parliamentary committee on defense and security, to the effect that Armenian desire to escape its isolation creates negotiating opportunities for Azerbaijan and referring to the processes as "parallel;" but also reflected their distrust of the "road map."

¶7. (U) Local online media gave extensive coverage to Turkish FM Davutoglu's commentary, emphasizing his statement that the GOT is not close to opening the border now. Coverage highlighted Davutoglu's pledge that Turkey would not harm Azerbaijan's interests and his statement that there could not really be peace in the region until the Karabakh problem is solved.

Comment: Why So Reasonable?

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¶8. (C) The MFA's statement linking the border opening to the Karabakh issue is not the result of a misunderstanding of the latest steps; rather it is a statement to Turkey of Azerbaijan's redlines. The Turkish FM's statement seems to have headed off the worst of the storm here in Baku. Official Baku has repeatedly said that it is not opposed to the broader Turkey-Armenia reconciliation process, but is strongly opposed to a border opening without Armenian

concessions on Nagorno-Karabakh (reftel). It seems clear that both the MFA and the Presidential Apparat understood that the latest statement is not a prelude to an imminent border opening. This is why they have responded relatively responsibly. Should it become clear that a border opening is closer, we can expect both public and private fireworks from Azerbaijan. Embassy Baku continues to recommend high-level attention to Azerbaijani officials to keep them from making unhelpful statements and interventions.

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